

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT COLONEL RICHARD HALL,  
COMMANDING OFFICER, TASK FORCE 2D BATTALION, 7TH MARINE REGIMENT, 1ST MARINE  
DIVISION, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM AFGHANISTAN TIME: 9:35 A.M. EDT DATE:  
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COL. HALL: Good morning.

SEAMAN WILLIAM SELBY (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public  
Affairs): Good morning, sir. My name is Seaman William Selby. I'm going to be  
moderating today's call today, or today's call. (Chuckles.) And I'm -- my name  
is Seaman William Selby with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Public  
Affairs.

A note to the bloggers today: Please remember to clearly state your  
name or blog/organization in advance of your question. And please respect our  
guest's time, keeping questions succinct.

Today our guest is U.S. Marine Lieutenant Colonel Richard Hall,  
commanding officer, Task Force 2D Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine  
Division, who will provide an operational update from Afghanistan.

And sir, if you have opening statements, you can go ahead with that  
right now.

COL. HALL: Okay. Who do we all have on the blogger tonight or, I  
should say, this morning?

Q This is Christopher Radin with the Long War Journal.

SEAMAN SELBY: Go ahead, Chris.

Christopher Radin with the Long War Journal and who -- Troy with --  
actually, Troy, can you state your blog organization?

Q Yes, sir. Hello again. This is Troy Steward from Bouhammer.com.

SEAMAN SELBY: And that is all right now, sir. That's -- we have two  
bloggers on the line. I have a few questions myself. My name is Seaman William  
Selby, again.

COL. HALL: Okay. So I understand there's a -- there's two folks on  
this morning. Is that right?

SEAMAN SELBY: Yes, sir.

COL. HALL: Okay. I'll just say once again good morning to you both, and I appreciate this opportunity to give you an update on what's going on over here in Afghanistan.

So I'll first start off by saying that our men are doing very well, and their morale is very high. And it's a long road, of course, but the amazing thing is their morale is truly amazing -- very, very high. And what else would you expect from a band of Marines? And of course I can't forget our magnificent sailors. And a belated happy birthday to all our naval brethren.

As far as an update, Task Force 2/7 continues to enhance security to all the districts that we're in. We are recently experiencing a decrease in the number of engagements, and we think it's due to a couple factors. One is, we've killed or captured a lot of the leadership, mostly the mid-level guys. Ramadan has probably affected their operations, you know, for these last 30 days. And the winter season is just starting to roll in, and so that's slowing them down a bit. But basically it's the first -- I mean, as we've killed or captured a lot of their leadership -- and that's taken a toll on them. So we're experiencing quite a down trend in activities, at least enemy engagement, that is.

We've now trained over 800 Afghan National Police and have placed them in their various districts. We've added a lot of money to the local economy. We're at about a million and a half right of contracts that are out there, improving the living conditions. We've opened some abandoned bazaars, initiated several longer-term projects, like mosques and schools and canals. And we're hoping to build a road here, probably not on our watch, but certainly on our replacements' watch.

All in all, we've done a lot. And we've only just gotten started, but we're going to have to hand it over to 3/8 -- (inaudible) -- will come in here, and I'm sure they'll take it up to the -- an exponential level.

And with that, I'll take your questions.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you very much, sir. And Chris, since you were on the line first, you can go ahead with your first question.

Q Thank you, and good morning, sir. This is Christopher Radin with the Long War Journal. If I understand it correctly, the program that you have for training the local police, the Focused District Development Program, has been going on for almost a year now. Can you give us an assessment on that, that strategy or methodology for training police? Do you think it's the appropriate strategy? Is it working well? And is it something you think is going to continue?

COL. HALL: Yes, I can talk to that. Let me just add to that. It's not just Focused District Development that 2/7 is working. They're also -- we are working a thing called In-District Reform -- (inaudible) -- in the more highly contested and sometimes enemy-held areas. That's why we were sent there, is to create a police capability in those districts. We had to go clear them out first in order to set the conditions to train and replace the ANP.

And to specifically answer your question, I think FDD and IDR are both good programs, if they are executed properly. And the only downfall that we've experienced so far has really been the recruiting aspect, and that is that we

really need to recruit from the districts in which we're going to reemplace those ANP. We've had great success so far in the six to eight weeks of training where we send them to the regional training centers. They get a good education, they come back, and there's an immediate change in the district when they go out there. All our guys that mentor them when they're back out in their districts have noted the significant improvements that are made.

So the training is going well, and the -- like I said before, it's just ensuring that we get the recruitment piece right, so we don't have an attrition piece to the -- so I think this next go-round we going to have that one solved. We're recruiting from the districts in which we're going to have them operate. So we learn by -- (inaudible). I think we got it right now. And so the next evolutions of FDD and IDR are going to be much more successful, and so it will be the way of the future -- (inaudible) -- in emplacing these ANP in the districts, which becomes the foundation for governance at that district level.

Q I'm not -- I'm sorry.

I'll let the last person go and then I'll ask another question later.

Q No, no, Chris, go ahead. I mean, it's only right now the two of us. While you're on a roll, feel free.

Q I'm not -- thank you. I'm not familiar with the in- district development program. How does that work and how's that different than the FDD program?

COL. HALL: Yeah, I'm sorry. I didn't explain that part very well. The IDR, In-District Reform, is just like the FDD. The only difference is you have ANCOP, which is the Afghan National Civil Order Police, that comes in to back the districts -- the FDD districts while the police go off to their eight weeks of training. The difference of IDR is we don't backfill them with ANCOP. We backfill them with Marines.

So on the districts that we go into, we provide the basic security that the police provided or, in most of our cases, there were no police. We were the only governance that existed. So we recruit them. We send them to school. They come back and then we emplace them and then we mentor them and try to show them what right looks like as they come out of school and we further develop their training and their performance in the district.

So that's really the biggest different between IDR and FDD is the lack of ANCOP in the IDR districts. It's replaced with Marines.

Q I see. Okay. Thank you.

SEAMAN SELBY: Okay, Troy. You want to go ahead?

COL. HALL: You're welcome.

Q Thank you, sir. Thank you. Hello again. This is Troy Steward from Bouhammer.com. We talked a few times. My first -- I have a couple. That's why went ahead and let Chris go, because -- (inaudible) -- get my in.

I know the 2/7 Marines, if I remember correctly, were extended a little bit, along with the 24th MEU. Are you past that extension? And if so, how has the soldiers' morale been? Have they felt that that was the right -- the right

way to go, to keep the fight -- to keep the fight going as you get into the winter months? COL. HALL: Yeah, the -- we're -- we have not passed our extension. So we are -- we're tracking as planned currently. And I think it was definitely the right call, because the replacement unit coming in needs a proper relief in place.

So the extension that we were given is to allow us to spend the correct amount of time in taking those new guys in here, getting them in the areas that we're operating, showing them the ropes and introducing them to the right people. And so we will spend time with them and do that proper handover before we leave. And this extension gives us that opportunity.

(Inaudible) -- right thing to do. We've been through these sort of things before in Iraq. So the Marines understand the concept very well of what we call the left-feet, right-feet turnover. And they know it's the right thing for their brothers coming in here -- 3/8. And we want to give them the proper introduction to the history, teach them the techniques and procedures that will keep them alive. And we owe that to our brothers. The Marines understand that. And they are definitely still motivated because they know there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Q Okay. All right. Thank you, sir. I'm going to go on to another one. You kind of gave me an idea on a second question.

You mentioned Iraq, and a lot of your Marines have been there. I know back when I was in Afghanistan, in '06-'07, the mindset with anyone being deployed there was you, hey, at least I'm going to Afghanistan; it's safer than Iraq.

Of course after I was there, I realized there was, there was no such thing. How has the -- have there been any misnomers? How has the perception been for your Marines that were in Iraq, that deployed with 2/7 or didn't?

When they were coming to Afghanistan, did they think, hey, at least it's Afghanistan; it's not Iraq. And then once they got there, did they kind of realize, wow, this is better, worse or just completely different. And I guess I'm asking more of your point of view and then also what you've kind of heard from your, from your Marines.

COL. HALL: You know, when we first came over here from the pre-deployment site survey, back in January, we learned a lot of the significant differences, between Iraq and Afghanistan, right up front. And we passed that on to the Marines. And I think that they have found that everything that we told them has come to be true. One of the first things that we mentioned was the people. The Afghan people are much more receptive of our presence. They're a more pragmatic people. They want what we want.

They take onboard the gifts that we give them, meaning the humanitarian assistance, the civil military projects that we engage them with. They're very, very receptive to that. And they don't tie a lot of strings to it.

So, (it means we ?) have a greater ability to relate to the people.

Training the ANP is also easier. They seem to be much more of a warrior class, similar to us, so we bond a lot quicker and tighter. And the Marines actually like to operate with the ANP and they refer to them as brothers. So I think at my level, what I see and certainly what the Marines

experience every day out there is it's a better situation on the ground as far as operating with the people.

The danger, they will quickly tell you, is it's much more kinetic here than it is in recent times in Iraq. Certainly not in the early days in Iraq, but they like to go to some of the guns, that's why they like coming here. We've got Marines who have just crossed or have been added to our rolls here as combat replacements, and they wanted to cross back over to 38 just so they could stay here and not go to Iraq because they like the fight and the enemy forces certainly are plentiful. That's what these guys came here to do, is take on the enemy as well as build prosperity for the people that they enjoy being around.

Q Okay, thank you very much, sir.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you, sir.

COL. HALL: You're welcome.

SEAMAN SELBY: Chris, do you have any follow-up questions right now?

Q Yeah, I have one more question. Sort of on a maybe a larger scale maybe you can give us a perspective of the -- you're training the Afghan National Army and they're increasing their capability at a particular rate. But from the stories we're hearing here the Taliban is also increasing its strength over the last year or so. And I'm wondering if you have a perspective on who is getting better faster and where this may be going in another year or so? Do we have the -- are we training the Afghan forces and our own forces sufficiently fast enough to keep ahead of what the Taliban is doing?

COL. HALL: Okay, the first thing I've got to mention is I need to correct you that we are training the Afghan National Police and not the army. But nonetheless, it's basically the same across the board. To answer your question, yes we are improving and we are improving faster than I believe the enemy is. Certainly, they have not given up or surrendered and there's been a lot of talk and certainly we've been hearing a lot of commentary about losing the war or the situation spiraling down and so forth. But specifically to answer your question, I can't speak for all of Afghanistan or the government, but what I can tell you is within our area of operations we ain't losing. And as I've said many, many times before, we are making gains every single day.

So, it's probably true that one can ensure an outcome by choosing defeat, but as far as our Marines, we don't do that. We're not accustomed to losing, so we choose to win. And we've always got our game face on for achieving success and 27's been doing a lot of that in our areas and taking the police to the next level, training them side-by-side.

So it's not to say that we've achieved total victory in our AO, but we have achieved a lot of success in and around portions of our AO. But like any war, you know, success starts out slowly and incrementally. And as you build capacity and earn trust, things improve.

So I can't speak at the political or governmental level, as there are certainly problems there that's going to take time to fix, but I'm speaking at the people level. We are making great strides with the people. And it's been our mantra since day one over here, is our focus is the people not the Taliban or the enemy forces. So we didn't come in with a defeatist attitude, and those that do are more likely to be defeated.

The other thing I'll tell you is that we have more confidence in the people of Afghanistan than apparently others do. So, they want security, they want legitimacy and we try to provide that to them just as we would want for our families. And so, we're making a difference with the people, with the ANP.

And like I said before, I can't speak for all Afghanistan but for our area in every single district we've been operating in we have seen improvements. And we've even seen the enemy start coming to us asking how they can switch sides. And so I'm very motivated for 38 coming in here because I think they're going to take it to the next level.

So, to finalize an answer to your question is I would say that we are definitely making gains. The ANP are improving. And as we recruit more numbers I think that tide is going to continue to improve as well.

Q Thank you.

SEAMAN SELBY: And Troy, did you have some follow-up?

Q Oh yes, of course I do. Sir, there's been a lot of talk about the unity the unity of command. General McCaffrey wrote a -- COL. HALL: Hello, are you still there?

Q Can you hear me, sir? Can you hear me, sir? Oh-oh. Are you guys there or did I lose everybody?

SEAMAN SELBY: Yeah, we're here, I'm the only --

COL. HALL (?): I'm not sure if you can hear me or not. There's no sound coming out on this end.

Q Can you hear me, sir? Have you got me? I think he may have --

SEAMAN SELBY: I'm going to try to contact him and tell him to call back in.

Q Okay.

COL. HALL: Hello, can you still hear me?

SEAMAN SELBY: Yes sir. Can you hear us, sir?

COL. HALL: Okay, I've got you. There was dead silence there for a little while.

SEAMAN SELBY: Sir, if that happens again if you could call back in immediately or --

COL. HALL: Okay, were you able to hear me?

SEAMAN SELBY: Yes sir, we could hear you fine on our end.

COL. HALL: Okay, great.

Q There's a lot of talk about the unity of command. General McCaffrey talked about an AOR but all the different commands, of course, they

have CSTCA, Task Force Phoenix, CBASE (ph) SADF, ISAF. And a couple of weeks ago I talked with a Marine Lieutenant Colonel out of 201st Corps who's in charge of the ETTs (ph) up there. And he talked about how he reported back to Okinawa

Can you kind of break down where you folks -- where your solid lines and dotted lines are and what your feelings are on unity of command? Currently the SECDEF is talking about bringing it back together, giving more control back to the U.S. Command so it's a little bit simpler and we have clear lines of communication. Can you kind of dive into that a little bit? COL. HALL: Sure, 27 has had an interesting command and control relationship, but I will say it was definitely functional. It was functional primarily due to personalities. That's not the best way to organize your command and control, however, and all of our chain of command has recognized that.

And so when the special purpose MAGTF comes in here they are going to be under a new command and control relationship which will streamline a lot of that and give them much more of a unified chain of command. They're fixing a lot of the problems that previously existed as to two separate chains of command trying to do the same mission, so to speak. When I say the same mission, although CSTCA has the training piece and ISAF has the security piece, you cannot divorce the two when it comes to local security because the ANP are doing the training and mentoring under CSTCA but they are still providing security under ISAF. So you've got two masters trying to employ them with no common command and control arbitrator. So that's been fixed for the special purpose MAGTF Afghanistan coming in here so they're not going to have any issues.

But I want to tell you, 27 really didn't have significant issues in the long run. We were able to work things out and this took a lot of extra time in communicating to each other what we needed. But it all worked out in the end. So in the future I don't think other units could be successful as we were because the boots on the ground are growing so you're going to have a lot more players on the field so there would be a lot more contention.

So it is important that we streamline the C2 line, which has been done. So I think the problem is going to get better over time. And certainly they'll work out some of the issues of the new chain of command. Ultimately, it's definitely going to be smoother.

Q Okay, sir. Can you kind of -- what is -- I guess your official chain of command -- what was it when you got on the ground? Was 27 reporting underneath Taskforce Phoenix or directly to CSTCA around Taskforce Phoenix? How was that structure set up?

COL. HALL: Yeah, we were under the operational control of MARCENT and we were under tactical control of CSTCA and exercised that control through ARSIC South. And then we subsequently coordinated with ARSIC West, being that we actually operated in both RC's, RC South and West. And again, through

personalities I actually knew the commanders of RC West and we'd served together before. So we were able to work that out just fine even though, of course both ARSIC's would have preferred that I was TACOM to them both.

But as you know, you have to have unity of command. So we determined that it would be strictly under ARSIC South, and then coordinating with ARSIC West and it worked out just fine for us. Now the new special purpose MAGTF, they will be -- currently I don't know if it's been finalized or not, but I do believe that they'll be TACOM under RC South and still operational controlled under MARCENT. So they will be TACOM to the battlespace owner, which is what it needed to be.

Q All right, thank you very much, sir. I appreciate that explanation.

COL. HALL: You're welcome.

SEAMAN SELBY: I have a question from Jennifer Hilad (ph) and -- well first, do you think it is important for another unit to continue the training mission there and why?

COL. HALL: It's absolutely important that we continue the training mission. But as we all say over here, we need to do it in the proper order, the clear, hold, build. And you cannot separate counterinsurgency from the training mission.

You've got to set the conditions first, and then provide a stable and secure environment in which you can practically and properly employ those ANSF, Afghan National Security Forces. So the first thing is the force comes in here and establishes themselves and initiates the security piece, as well as then what we had to do is we had to concurrently do the training and mentoring of the ANP. But the proper order is to clear first and then do the hold and build.

But again, I think a lot of people get confused, that they are separate and distinct, when in fact the training and mentoring is more or less a subset of counterinsurgency operations. So, with that, that is definitely going to be the way of the future, to continue to grow the ANP because that is the foundation of governance at those district levels. And across Afghanistan, at the local constituency level, they don't have a true understanding, concept of government.



So we have to teach them that. And the first form of that instruction is the introduction to rule of law, which is exercised by the ANP or the ANA. And so that has to, you know, be embedded in all these different district areas and then spread from there so they get the concept and the understanding of what government is all about.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you, sir, and one more from Jennifer. She just asked, what advice would you give to the incoming 38 Marines?

COL. HALL: The most important piece that I will be telling them is to continue focusing on the people. You have, you know, the two sides, you know -- we always talk about our mission being training and mentoring police. We have to have the willing acceptance of the people of those trained and more respectable police so they have to accept them and abide by that rule of law. So, when you bring them in and show them that these are not the old Taliban coming in to exact illegal fines or taxes from them or run drugs and force them to give you food and water so they can continue in their illegal activities and so forth, they're going to see that these are true policemen and exercise the rule of law.

And when you add to that the civil-military operations and proper communication of our intentions here, that is focusing on the people so they understand what our purpose is and what we're trying to achieve for their future, for their prosperity, for their security. And ultimately, as we continue focusing on the people we are going to teach them to take care of affairs for themselves, we can find that exit strategy sometime down the road, when we no longer have to provide things for them, they'll be doing it themselves.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you very much, sir. And thank you all. We've had some great questions and comments today. As we wrap up today's call, Lieutenant Colonel Hall do you have a closing comment?

COL. HALL: Okay, I'll just say this, that although we (take out ?) a lot of the enemy and as I mentioned right up front we have taken a lot of enemy out, it has not been our focus of operations, because that's a temporary effect. They will get back-filled. We have focused on the enduring effort, those things that will last, those operations which create a foundation for the future, like building schools, educating people, building roads, providing jobs and aiding commerce.

We've trained and mentored over -- (inaudible) -- police, who are becoming more proficient and respectable and legitimate, which is as I said before, an extension of government down to that district level. Bottom line, we have worked to give the people liberty. And our ultimate aim has always been to create a safe and prosperous environment so the people will willingly (view ?) those new trained and respectable police as a legitimate form of local government.

And we'll continue to create conditions where the people will take responsibility for providing for their future. In other words, teach that man to fish. And I'm sure 38 is going to experience tremendous success as they work towards that end with our Afghan brothers.

And with that, I appreciate the opportunity to let you know what's going on in Afghanistan.

SEAMAN SELBY: Thank you again, sir. We all appreciate your time and wish you good luck over there and wish you well. So thank you once again for your time. Today's program will be available on line at bloggers link on dod.mil, where you'll be able to access a story based on today's call along with source documents such as the audio file and print transcript. Again, thank you Lieutenant Colonel Hall and our blogger participants.

COL HALL: Thank you again. I appreciate it.

SEAMAN SELBY: You're welcome, sir. Please feel free to disconnect.

END.